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**Press release
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Thirty Fourth Anniversary of the "Black January"

On 20 January 2024, Azerbaijan commemorates the thirty fourth anniversary of the "Black January". Today thousands of people visited the Martyr's Alley in the capital of Azerbaijan Baku to pay tribute to those who sacrificed their lives for the independent Azerbaijan.

At the end of the 1980's the people of Azerbaijan filled the streets and squares of Baku and other cities to protest illegal territorial claims of neighboring Armenia, killings, persecution and forced mass expulsion of more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands in Armenia and the unjust policy pursued by the leadership of the Soviet Union towards Azerbaijan and its territorial integrity. In response, the Soviet leadership resorted to violence to suppress free expression of popular will.

During the night of 19-20 January 1990, following a series of provocations orchestrated by the central authorities and the USSR State Security Committee, Soviet troops stormed Baku and other major cities and towns in Azerbaijan. As a result of a full-scale military assault, 131 civilians were killed, 744 people were wounded and 841 were indiscriminately and unlawfully detained or arrested.

Among other acts, Soviet soldiers were observed executing wounded, firing at passersby and at dwellings, stores, medical and other facilities. In several cases tanks and armored vehicles crushed or opened fire upon moving as well as parked civilian vehicles. Clearly marked ambulances became targets and were not allowed to aid the wounded. Many civilians were shot in their apartments, building entryways, buses and places of employment. During examination of bullet wounds on bodies forensic experts noted the particularly damaging effects of military grade bullets.

By using military force the Soviet leadership was aiming to frighten the people of Azerbaijan, break their resistance and maintain the communist rule in the republic. In opposite, the "Black January" gave a new impetus to the national liberation movement. On 22 January 1990, 2 million people attended the funeral ceremony of martyr's in Baku. On 18 October 1991, Azerbaijan restored its independence. Indeed, the "Black January" is not only a tragedy, but also a victory of the unarmed people over the totalitarian regime.
